United Nations

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Inter-agency meeting in Geneva on United Nations humanitarian operation in Iraq, Kuwait, and Iraqi border areas agrees to dispatch high-level mission to area.

- Secretary-General announces pledges of $85 million to United Nations humanitarian efforts in Iraq, Kuwait, and Iraqi border areas; $8 million to deploy United Nations security guards in Iraq.

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Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar today in Geneva presided over a United Nations inter-agency meeting on the Organization's humanitarian operation in Iraq and Kuwait. Participating in the meeting, which was convened to review the critical situation in the Gulf region, were his Executive Delegate, Sadruddin Aga Khan, and the executive heads of United Nations specialized agencies and programmes responsible for the humanitarian efforts in the area.

Participants in the inter-agency meeting noted with satisfaction the pledges received at yesterday's pledging conference, but recalled that more than half the amount needed for the humanitarian operations remained outstanding.

They welcomed the operation's achievements to date and analysed the key problems remaining. They agreed that monitoring should be strengthened on the ground, particularly regarding food, nutrition and health needs. They also reiterated the need for security for the staff involved.

In the light of deteriorating conditions for civilians in the area, the meeting decided that a high-level mission should be undertaken to conduct an updated and more precise assessment of the current humanitarian needs and to recommend remedial measures.

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The meeting also reviewed the critical situation in Africa and recalled the dispatch of a high-level mission to be led by the Executive Director of the World Food Programme to evaluate emergency needs and prepare a report on the situation for the Secretary-General.

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The Secretary-General in a statement yesterday at the pledging conference for United Nations humanitarian assistance to Kuwait, Iraq and Iraqi border areas presented preliminary estimates of the contributions made by States. He said pledges amounted to some $85 million, and 150 security guards had been made available by three countries. He added that more support was needed to reach the $450 million budget, of which only $280 for humanitarian relief had so far been pledged. Of the $35 million budget for guards, $8 million was pledged at the conference.

The Secretary-General went on to say that the deployment of the United Nations Guard Contingent was "perhaps not the ideal solution", but that it seemed to be the best way of responding to an urgent need which could not be ignored. The guards would constitute an important element in the overall plan for dealing with the problem of the security of operations, he said, adding that the plan could contribute to restoring calm in the region.

The Secretary-General stressed that the humanitarian efforts did not only concern the Kurds but also the Shi'ites in southern Iraq. Public attention, he said, was focusing above all on the plight of the Kurds, while the needs of the Shi'ites tended to be neglected.

After the meeting yesterday, the Secretary-General attended a working luncheon hosted by his Executive Delegate, Sadruddin Aga Khan, and with the participation of the heads of the United Nations humanitarian agencies at which the urgent situation in Africa was discussed, in particular the developments in Ethiopia.

The Secretary-General also presided over a pledging conference on Western Sahara after which he left Geneva for Bern where he will take part tomorrow in ceremonies marking the 700th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation.

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